

Calling God, may your presence be known in our midst and may your word guide us as we seek to have a living, vibrant relationship with you. Amen

For those of you who are still wondering why I take my shoes off in worship - and yes, they are off, even today, as we sit in our virtual sanctuary – this scripture story is the reason. This story of going about your own business, doing what you have done for years, and suddenly being confronted by God, called to a task you are pretty sure you have little or no skill set for, one you never even considered when considering career choices; one that you will only accomplish through the grace and mercy of God. This, my friends, is holy ground. It's where I found myself 20 years ago, where I've found myself every day since and it is where Moses finds himself in today's story of the Hebrew faith.

Moses is not a saint, in fact, he's a murderer, he's not a man of God, a priest like his father-in-law - he's a shepherd; and although it was his compassion and love for his people that led him to kill the Egyptian who was abusing a Hebrew man, he's not really an outspoken activist, rather his preference is for the shepherd's life of solitude and quiet.

So it is likely that Moses neither sees himself as an upstanding citizen, nor worthy of God's presence and call on his life.

We aren't told why Moses decides, that morning, to lead the flock "beyond the wilderness to Horeb, the Mount of God" but he does. He leads the sheep to the very mountain where Elijah learns to listen for God and finds that voice in the sheer silence.

But sometimes, it seems, God is also in the wind, the earthquake ... and the burning bush! So speak, God does! As Moses approaches the bush to figure out why it's not being destroyed by the fire, I imagine him hearing the band Meatloaf singing "Stop right there! I gotta know right now! Do you love me? Will you love me forever? 'Cause I need you, I will never leave you...."

Okay, maybe that's not exactly how the story goes, but God does say "Stop where you are. Take off your shoes. This is holy ground. Feel it beneath your feet. Come to know it well."

Such instruction invites us to do likewise, to slow down, pay attention, experience the place in which we find ourselves and know that whatever unusual situation we might be in, it could just be our own holy ground experience where God is waiting to speak, waiting to invite us into an adventure we may think we have no skill set for, no time for, no burning passion to get involved in. And yet, here we are, face to face with God and with the burning bush that God calls us to tend to.

A question I am sometimes asked is, "Yes, but how do you know if it is God or not?" Our story of Moses and of other biblical characters hold the answer to that question. Notice that Moses didn't go looking for a burning bush, it simply appeared to him. Note also, that Moses' initial response isn't "Well, finally! What took you so long!" but rather "Who, me? Whatch you talkin' 'bout?!"

You see, God's call is almost always unexpected, often unwanted, and always, exactly what we need to do and where we need to be.

I think the challenge for us today, hearing stories like that of Moses, is that we think a "CALL" is some grand act that, if done well will rocket us to sainthood, and if done poorly, well ... the phrase "it's all going to hell in a handbasket" comes to mind.

But while we are all like unsuspecting shepherds tending our sheep, our calling isn't always to fight Pharoah and lead thousands of people to freedom. Although, sometimes it is! Sometimes the call is to stand up to unjust politicians and societal standards, to protest and speak out against the injustice of racism, sexism, and all that is unjust in society. To those I say, God bless you, and thank you for accepting the call! Know that God is with you, even and especially in the most challenging times.

More often, however, our burning bush, our word from God, entails smaller but effective actions like: instead of chuckling to be polite, silently enduring or tsking under our breath, be proactive in calling out friends, family and strangers who use racial slurs, mis-treat people because of race, colour, or sexual orientation. Tell them it is not acceptable.

Our call may require shifting some of our own habits that are harmful to the environment and to others. Perhaps it will require offering forgiveness and releasing long held grudges that do nobody any good. Because, after all, like Moses, we are far from perfect, and may not be shining examples of the faith, but still God calls us to act in faith.

Maybe your call is to be present and a witness to the lives and emotions of others. This is what Mark Nepo in *The Book of Awakening* calls learning to “feel your way into the lives of others”. Nepo shares this story:

*...I went for groceries and the old man packing bags was staring off. I knew by his heavy, silver eyes that he was a widower, and just as he lifted my no-fat cottage cheese, he was seeing her floating somewhere before him, and the soda and the swordfish and English muffins were piling up as the black belt kept moving, and I gently took the cottage cheese from him, and he returned, looking at me, a bit dizzy to still be here.*

*I've worked so long and hard to be able to feel my way into the lives of others...” states Nepo “... it is the ground of heart where we all meet. ... When the talking's done we become still proofs of love. I left the store that day feeling more than one heart should and couldn't tell if I was in trouble or on holy ground.”*

“Am I on holy ground?” “Is this my burning bush?” “Is God present in this time and place, inviting me, calling me to something?”

Perhaps these are the questions we need to be asking ourselves. Especially in those times when we are going about our own business, doing what we have done for years, and suddenly or not so suddenly feel compelled to act, called to a task we are pretty sure we have little or no skill set for; one that we will only accomplish through the grace and mercy of God.

Go ahead. Ask yourself “Am I on holy ground?” “Is this my burning bush?” “Is God present in this time and place, inviting me, calling me to something?”

Go ahead, take off your shoes, feel the ground beneath your feet, experience the holy ground on which you stand, celebrate God’s presence there and know that whether the task be great or small, this burning bush is calling you. God is calling you and God will be with you as you seek to have a living, vibrant relationship with The Holy One. May it be so. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Nepo, Mark. The Book of Awakening. Red Wheel/Weiser, LLC. Newburyport, MA. 2020